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ART. IX. — CRITICAL NOTICES.

1. — *A History of the Second Church, or Old North, in Boston, to which is added a History of the New Brick Church, with Engravings.* By CHANDLER ROBBINS, Minister of the Second Church. Published by a Committee of the Society. Boston. 1852. 8vo. pp. 320.

THE early history of the Colony of Massachusetts is ecclesiastical rather than civil. The Church was identified with the State, — not by express enactment, not by any cunningly devised scheme of theocratic polity, but through the character of the Colonists, and the intentions with which they came hither. One who may be ranked with the Fathers of the Colony, though he was not born till nine years after Winthrop landed, in his “Last Testimony to the Churches,” written at the age of eighty-four, says with great solemnity, — “I do declare, that *the principal design* upon which these Colonies were first planted was to profess and practise and enjoy, with undisturbed liberty, the holy religion of God our Saviour, and more particularly to set up churches for our Lord Jesus Christ, that shall keep themselves loyal to him, their glorious king.” The body politic was an aggregate of individual churches, or congregations, each one of which acted as a unit, either in colonizing a new town, or in removing from one town to another, till it had found a suitable locality for settlement. Weathersfield, Windsor, and Hartford, in Connecticut, were thus founded by emigrant churches from Massachusetts, — the original type of the proceeding being the removal, in a body, of Mr. Robinson’s congregation, first from England to Holland, and afterwards from Holland to Plymouth, in America. It was not that other ties, political and social, did not, then as now, exist and operate; but the church tie, the bond of religious union and brotherhood in Christ, in the eyes of the Puritans of New England, so far transcended in interest and importance all other relations, that the latter sank into comparative insignificance. Religion was not confined to Sundays, but extended over all the days of the week; in like manner, it was not limited to the proper observances of the sanctuary and the closet, but it covered all the purposes, relations, and conduct of life. The state, like every thing else, was made subservient to it. Clergymen were not, indeed, made magistrates or legislators, and were not ambitious of such distinction, which would have been no promotion for

them. But magistrates and legislators came to the clergy for counsel and direction, seeking their aid and guidance in the conduct of the State, just as, in their other or domestic relations, they went to them for ghostly counsel in the management of their families. In fact, the State, in the early days of New England, was only a large family, the magistrates bearing a sort of patriarchal relation to it, with ill-defined but very extensive powers, and the clergy, its spiritual guides,—the province of religion then being deemed coextensive with human affairs,—directing it in every thing. Thus, the State was hardly at all theocratic in form, while it was radically, and almost exclusively, theocratic in essence and principle.

The theocratic *form* hardly anywhere appeared, except in the peculiar regulation, that to be a church-member was a necessary qualification for becoming a freeman or a voter. And this regulation, under the circumstances, was the most natural thing in the world. It was not at all intolerant. The Colony was formed of such materials, that this was the most liberal qualification that could have been devised; for it included nearly all the heads of families and males of mature years, hired servants excepted, who had emigrated for the distinctive purpose for which the Colony was formed. It was no more exclusive or illiberal than the rule universally adopted by such private corporations as banks and trading companies, that none but stockholders shall have a vote in the choice of the directors. When “the principal design” of the emigration was “to set up churches for our Lord Jesus Christ” in the wilderness, none but church-members were likely to join the Colony, and certainly none but church-members ought to have had a voice in the management of its affairs.

But it is not our object to enter into any disquisition upon the early polity of New England. We wished only to explain and justify the remark, that a large portion of our early history must be sought in the records of the churches, and in a careful study of the ecclesiastical system; and, therefore, that publications like this one by Mr. Robbins have here a wider interest and greater relative importance than in any other country in the world. We have too long delayed noticing this particular work, yet not from any lack of appreciation of the value of its contents or its literary merit. The author is the present minister of the Second, or Old North, Church, in Boston, one of the most venerable and remarkable establishments of its class in New England, and one which, in its history and in the lives and characters of the many eminent men who have at different periods ministered to it, may be said to be typical of that class. With a heartfelt interest in the subject, and after patient study of the old records and of the contempora-

neous history of Massachusetts, the writer has given, in perspicuous and graceful language, a very complete and trustworthy account of the earlier and later fortunes of the church, and a loving portraiture of those who have preceded him in its pastoral office. The story which he has had to tell is not one of unbroken prosperity. Through many changes and difficulties, — *per varios casus et tot discrimina rerum*, — the church has come to its present condition of ease and quiet action, though in a comparatively narrow sphere. But to trace its vicissitudes of fortune was not the hardest portion of his task ; his subject led him to broach many disputed and delicate themes in history, politics, and theology, all of which he has touched with becoming frankness, yet in a temperate and tolerant disposition, and with the mild words that turn away offence. The volume is deeply imbued, as it should be, with the spirit of Christian piety, but is wholly free from sectarian dogmatism.

The chief interest of the work gathers around the characters of the two Mathers, father and son, who were ministers of the church, the first for sixty-two, and the second for forty-four years. For thirty-nine years, they labored together, as pastor and colleague. No names are better known in the early church history of New England, than those of Increase and Cotton Mather. Few have had more strongly-marked characters, have exerted a wider influence on the men of their generation, or have had so widely different opinions formed of them in the judgment of posterity. We have copious materials on which to found our knowledge of them ; their works, which remain both in print and manuscript, are more abundant and voluminous than any one nowadays cares to read. Both kept private diaries, yet extant, in which they seem to have made it a point of religion to record all those inmost thoughts and feelings which ordinary men are not only chary of communicating to others, but are even reluctant to bring out in full consciousness to themselves. Diaries thus written are curious and valuable, from the light which they throw upon the imperfections and infirmities of our common nature ; but they should obviously be used with great caution when we are forming an opinion of the diarist himself, as compared with other men, of whose secret purposes and failings we have no such complete record. All men have their weak hours ; at times, and under the pressure of peculiar circumstances and temptations, we are all, more or less, simple, credulous, vain, jealous, ambitious, impure, or, perhaps, corrupt.

“ For where's that palace, whereinto foul things
Sometimes intrude not ? Who has a breast so pure,
But some uncleanly apprehensions

Keep leets and law-days, and in session sit
With meditations lawful ? ”

But few men have strength of mind enough to acknowledge these failings, even to themselves, and very few indeed are willing to make a record of them, though with a reservation that it is to be seen by no eyes but their own. But if such diaries are sometimes written, and chance should bring one or two of them to light, let them be viewed as revelations of the general weakness of human nature, and not of the peculiar weakness of the unhappy diarist. Two characters of some distinction in English history have been treated, as we conceive, with great injustice, from neglect of this consideration ; we mean Archbishop Laud, and Pepys, the well known Secretary of the Admiralty under Charles II. And among the Americans who have suffered in this way, the strongest case is that of Increase and Cotton Mather.

We are not going into a defence of the characters of these two men ; Mr. Robbins has performed this task admirably. We are not sure that their characters need any defence, though President Quincy, in his excellent History of Old Harvard, has brought forward their faults rather more prominently than we could wish. Yet there is no necessary discrepancy between his portraiture of them, and the one which is drawn by the loving hand of a successor of theirs in the pastoral office. There is no discrepancy to one who keeps steadily in view the manifold contradictions and inconsistencies of human nature in general, and of the Mather nature in particular. The whole subject is summed up in the old apologue of the two sides of the shield. Both the Mathers had failings which a child might smile at, and virtues which a saint might admire. Some are led unconsciously, — perhaps by the nature of the work on which they are engaged, — to look solely at the failings ; others can see nothing but the virtues. Perhaps a wise man will try to see both.

But Mr. Robbins's book opens so many of our favorite themes for disquisition, that we shall never make an end if we attempt to consider them all. We close abruptly, therefore, by strongly commending his labors to the student of our early New England history, and to the admirer of the virtues of the founders and spiritual fathers of Massachusetts.